



## OVERCOMING FATIGUE



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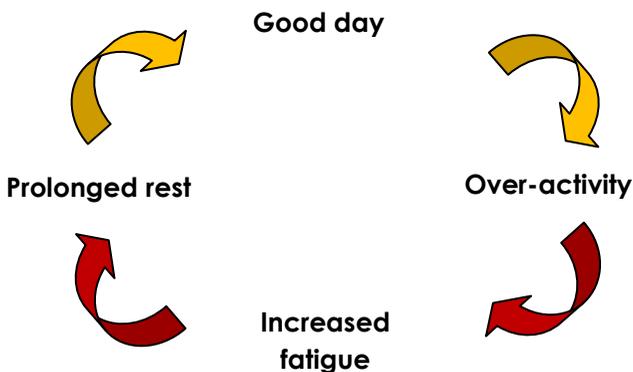
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# 1. What is fatigue?

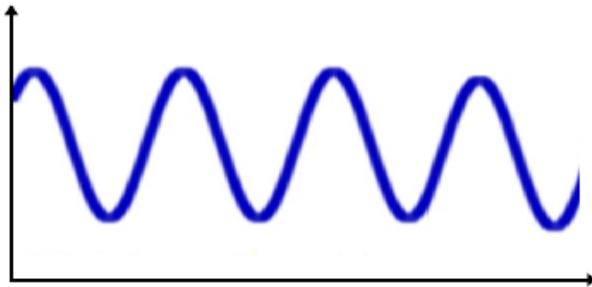
Fatigue can affect how you feel both physically and mentally. It means you don't have the energy you want to do everyday things and **is different from just feeling tired**.

# 2. How will I get better?

Often people with fatigue, maybe following a viral infection, are advised by their GPs to “rest” or “take it easy”. For some people, the advice to rest can cause confusion over whether it is safe to engage in physical activity. Our experience of how people recover following illness is that **too much *inactivity* can hinder progress**.



However, **too much *activity* can be followed by a worsening of symptoms**, leading to prolonged rest-sometimes called the 'boom and bust' cycle. It can be tempting to do a lot when you start to feel better but this may lead to a few days recovering in bed.

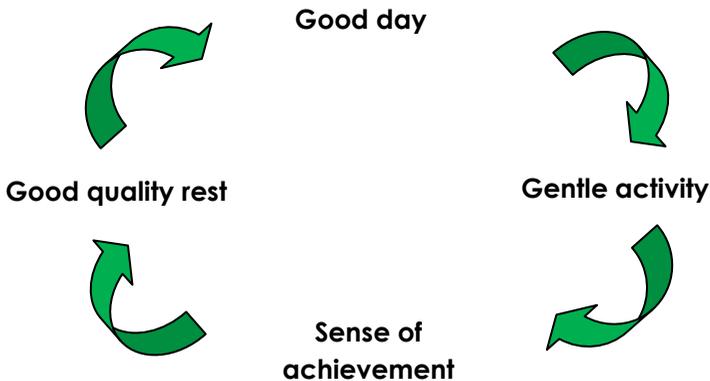


Everyday life always has highs and lows of energy and activity.

To help you recover it is useful to remember this and avoid extreme highs and lows which can become a vicious circle of 'boom-and-bust', and instead keep your activity levels within a manageable and sustainable range.

### 3. Managing energy

**Recovery is helped by balancing rest with a gentle return to activity and exercise** in the weeks and months following illness.



Taking **a balanced, steady approach** to activity counteracts the common tendency to swing from one extreme to another so that you can start recovering.

- Find a low level of activity that you can manage on a daily basis.
- Aim to keep your activity at your planned level: don't be tempted to do more on a good day.
- Establish a routine.

It can be helpful to think of your available energy as being like a mobile phone battery:

- If you completely drain the battery, you have to wait to recharge it before you can use the phone again



OR



- If you use *some* of the battery and make regular top-ups, then your phone will always be ready for use.

**Managing your energy through planned periods of activity and rest will mean that you are more likely to be able to do the activities that you want to do.**

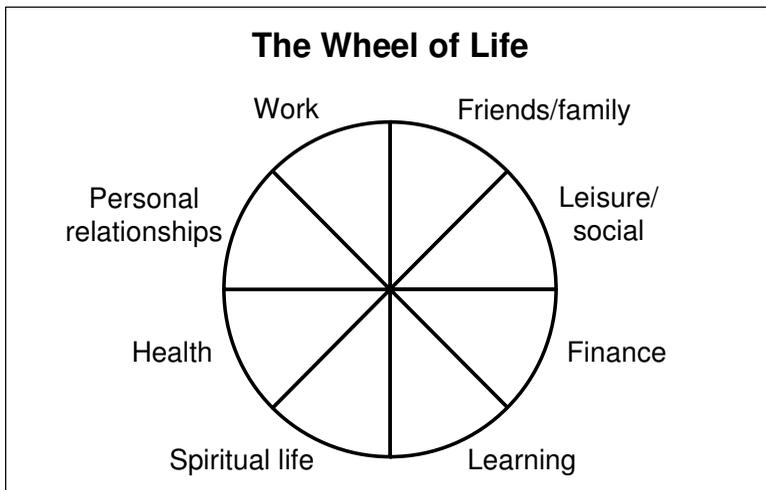
## 4. Types of energy you use and **activity management**

'Activities' can be either **physical, mental or emotional**. Think about how much energy you are expending in these terms and check that you have a mixture of different types of activity. When you don't feel well for a time you can miss out physical activity or find that you spend a lot of your day in front of screens. (tv computer). Balancing out different activities helps level out the boom and bust cycle.

For example, watching tv. may not use up much physical energy but can be high in terms of mental and emotional energy. You might use mental energy to concentrate on a plot, remember what has been going on and you could use emotional energy either by your emotional response to what is on, or it could be that you are bored or fed up with yourself for watching tv.

**Using activity management means balancing daily activity and rest to bring about improvements.**

Look at the 'wheel of life' diagram. Score each segment of the circle out of 10, 0 being least satisfied and 10 being most satisfied.



Look at the segments that scored lowest and ask:

- What would 10/10 feel, look and sound like to you?
- How would your life be different if you scored 10/10 in that area?
- What can you do to move your score up one point?

**The aim is to achieve as much balance in day to day life as possible as this will help your recovery.** Getting better may be delayed at times of particular stress, so developing skills of stress management and relaxation can be helpful.

## 5. Fatigue and Sleep



Everybody needs different amounts of sleep, and sometimes when people are fatigued they can experience disrupted sleep patterns. Some people find it hard to get to sleep, or wake up often during the night while others may feel the need to sleep for more hours than usual. This can reduce the quality of night time sleep so avoid daytime sleep as much as you can.

- Good sleep is about **quality, not quantity**.
- Gradually cut out daytime sleep. Substitute with some quiet/lower energy activity.
- Stick to a regular bedtime, and more importantly, stick to a regular time to get up.
- A good balance between activity and rest during the day will help.
- During the evening, particularly just before bedtime, it helps to have a regular set of activities that involve your winding down. Take less exercise at this time of day, avoid stimulants such as coffee, and avoid other things that wind you up.
- If you wake in the night and can't get back to sleep straight away (20 minutes) get up! Try to relax and take rest instead. Only go back to bed when you have a good chance of falling asleep again.

## 6. Illness and stress

Stress is a normal reaction to the challenges we face in life. A certain amount of stress is necessary to keep us all going; without it, we would feel bored and listless. However, **continued stress over a long period of time can be exhausting**, and if your energy levels are low due to illness the additional drain on energy because of stress is a particular problem.

People differ both in the way that they react to stress and the extent to which they are aware of their own stress levels. It may affect us physically, emotionally and in the way that we behave including poor concentration, memory problems and difficulties making decisions. Some of the possible effects that stress may have are listed below;

<u>Physical Changes</u>	<u>Emotional effects</u>	<u>Other people notice</u>
Heart racing	Tense	“Short fuse”
Sweating	Frustrated	Always rushing
Breathing faster	Afraid	Loss of humour
Queasy stomach	Irritable/angry	Impatience
Trembling	Tiredness	Don't listen
Dry throat	Fear or dread	Sudden mood change
Muscle tension	Argumentative	Forgetful

All of these physical reactions are normal. When we face a physically threatening situation these responses help the body prepare itself for action. This is known as the “Fight or Flight” response because the body prepares itself to fight, or run away from dangerous situations. This is a helpful, instinctive response. When the dangerous situation is over, the body can begin to recover.

In modern society, a lot of the things that create stress are not dangerous situations where we can physically fight or run away from something. For example, financial worries or family problems can make us feel under stress. In these situations stress levels may rise and remain quite high, and after a while we may begin to feel the effects of this. **Over a long period of time stress can make us feel exhausted and unwell.**

## 7. Reducing stress through relaxation

Most people already have things they do when they realise they are **experiencing stress - there are lots of possible ways of tackling it**. Some people listen to music, talk with a friend, or go for a walk. Regular exercise can also help to reduce tension in the muscles, and give a feeling of wellbeing. It is useful to have some specific methods for times when stress rises beyond a certain point.

**Becoming aware of the signs** of increased tension and stress and spotting them at an early stage **is a useful start**. We are often not aware of tension in our bodies. Listening to a relaxation tape is one way of beginning to become more aware. **Learning to relax** means that you can reduce muscle tension and **break out of the vicious cycle of fatigue, stress and tension**. Relaxation is different from watching TV or reading a book, where it is quite easy to remain tense, and may be tiring in their own right. When practising relaxation you need to find somewhere quiet and warm, where you can find a comfortable position and you will not be interrupted.

Relaxation is a skill, and is likely to take a bit of practice to master. Remember that **there are different forms of relaxation** to meet individual preferences. Daily practise will give the best results and it is worth seeing the initial stages as an investment for the longer term.

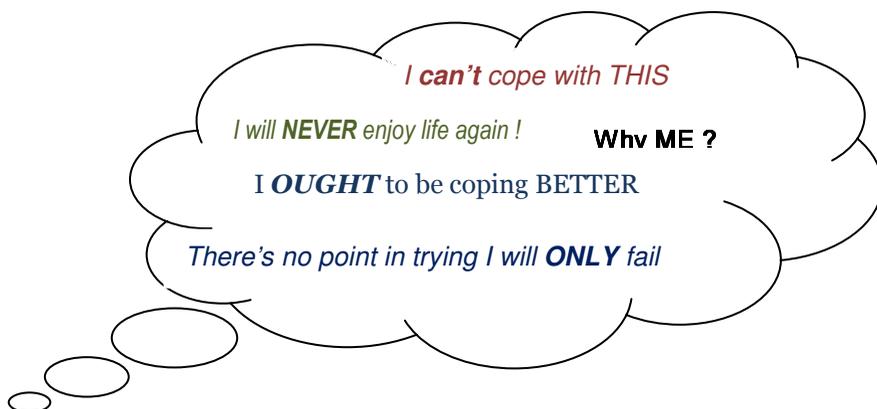
## 8. Why is thinking important in fatigue?

In **everyday life** we are faced with many situations that **can put us under stress**. For example, failing to get a job, or having an argument with someone you love are situations that can feel stressful-having fatigue can also be a source of stress.

**Stressful situations** can produce a range of feelings. Some people report feeling depressed or unhappy, others may feel anxious, angry, disappointed or helpless. **The way in which we respond to these events will affect how much we feel we are coping with the situation.**

The way in which fatigue affects your emotions will partly depend on how you are thinking about it. It will also depend on what you are thinking about yourself, and your future.

Here are some thoughts that people sometimes have:

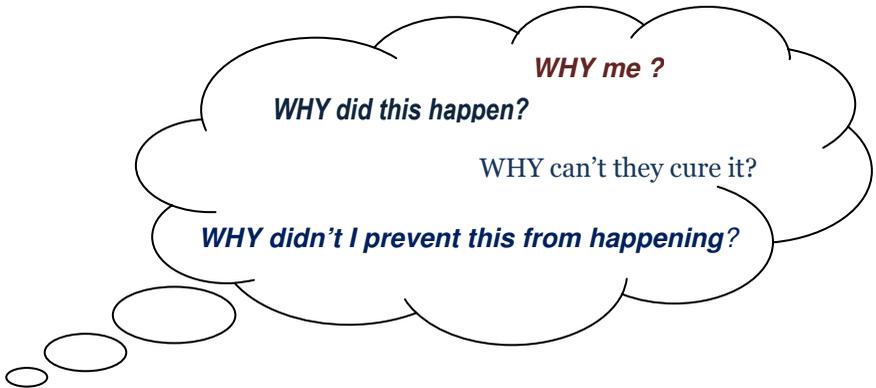


The thoughts listed above are all examples of **NEGATIVE thinking**. These thoughts are not necessarily true, or easy to prove or answer. They are negative because they are **UNHELPFUL**.

Negative or unhelpful thoughts can make you feel even more distressed. It does not only affect how we feel, but it also affects what we do. For instance, if you are saying to yourself “I can't cope”, then it is likely you will feel less able to find ways of coping. Negative thoughts therefore encourage negative feelings, which in turn can stop you from using constructive ideas for coping with fatigue.

## 9. Looking at negative thoughts

### The “why” thoughts...

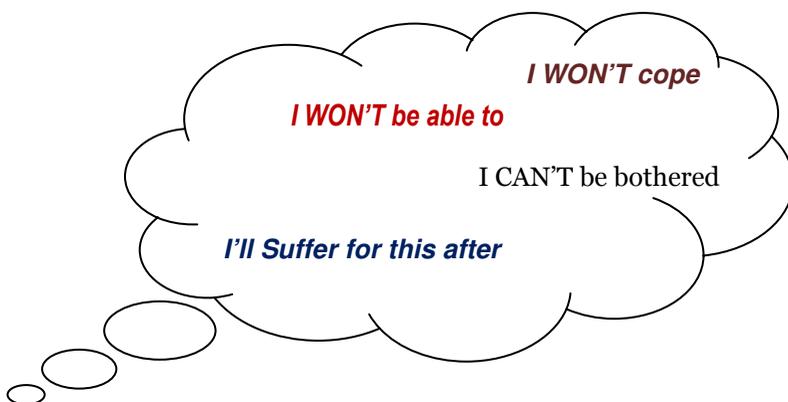


There may not be a simple explanation for why you feel fatigued. Continuing to ask yourself “why” when there is no apparent answer will get in the way of you taking constructive action to deal with your problem. You continue to focus on the past and on your fatigue, rather than looking for solutions or distractions.

So, rather than asking WHY DID THIS HAPPEN? ask yourself..

***What can I do to overcome it?***

Sometimes fatigue and other feelings can eat away at your confidence. Perhaps you have found that you are sometimes prevented from finishing a task or going somewhere enjoyable. The next time the opportunity arises, how do you think and feel about it? Some **negative thoughts** in this situation are: -



If you often think along these lines then you will find yourself gradually avoiding more and more situations, becoming more inactive, feeling like a failure and focusing more on your fatigue.

## 10. How do I change negative thoughts ?

**Negative thinking creates emotions and does not help** us in dealing with situations effectively.

**It is possible to change** the way in which we think about the situation, to replace negative thoughts with more balanced ones.



### **Identifying negative thoughts**

Patterns of thinking can become automatic over time. We probably don't notice much of what we are saying to ourselves. In order to change negative thoughts we have to start noticing them happening.

Carry a small notebook around with you for a week or so. Try to notice what you are saying to yourself in the course of the day and write these thoughts down. Notice particularly what is on your mind when you are feeling unhappy or upset. What thoughts are behind this?

## Make your thoughts specific



What exactly do you mean when you say, “I can’t cope”? What do you feel is going to happen?



## Challenge your negative thought

Ask yourself “How much do I believe this? What is the evidence that this will happen? Does it matter if it does? How can I prevent it?”



## Find a more balanced thought

Prove to yourself that your negative thought might not be true, and find a more balanced way of thinking about the situation.

**Balanced thoughts are thoughts that allow you to gain more confidence in yourself**, and to take action that will make you feel more in control.

## Examples of balanced thoughts

- “I may not be able to finish this, but I can do some of it today if I pace myself.”
- “If I use my relaxation tape, I will feel better able to cope.”
- “I can find a way of distracting myself from my problem.”

Make sure that the balanced thoughts you find are meaningful to you. If you do not believe these thoughts they will not help you.

Write balanced thoughts down on a small card and carry them around with you. Get the card out and read them when you find yourself having negative thoughts.

## **Other strategies**

- Do not avoid an activity because you feel you won't cope with it.
- Find new ways of carrying out an activity, through pacing.
- Keeping active can serve as a distraction from negative thoughts. Set yourself a plan of activities for the week ahead.
- Keep a diary of your progress week by week. Only write positive events in it e.g. Do not compare yourself to how you were before, but to how you have been recently – look back over your diary.

11. What am I going to do now?



Use the space below to list some of the things that will support you while you recover:

1

2

3

4

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## Acknowledgements

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